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Summary record of the 14th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 23 October 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Sharma ..... (Nepal)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 116: Pattern of conferences (*continued*) (A/56/901; A/57/32 and Corr.1, A/57/228 and Add.1 and 2, A/57/289 and A/57/472)

1. **Mr. Jalang'o** (Kenya) welcomed the efforts made over the past year to improve the utilization of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) and the resultant increase in the number of meetings and events held there, a development to which the establishment of a permanent interpretation service had also contributed. He was concerned, however, that a large number of meetings organized by the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) were held away from headquarters. He urged the Secretary-General to take steps to ensure that most, if not all, meetings and activities related to the environment and to human settlements were held in Nairobi. It was his hope that a concerted effort would be made to bring UNON, which was the only United Nations administrative office in the developing world, to the level of the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna.

2. In paragraph II.24 of its resolution 56/242, the General Assembly had reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to consider improving and modernizing the conference facilities at UNON in order to accommodate adequately major meetings and conferences and to report thereon to the Assembly at its resumed fifty-sixth session. No such report had been submitted; that was regrettable since, as the Committee on Conferences had noted in paragraph 50 of its report (A/57/32), the severe constraints inherent in the existing facilities posed a serious challenge for any further increase in utilization. In that connection, he asked why no written report on the utilization of conference services at UNON had been made available for consideration.

3. During the previous session, his delegation had been given an assurance that action would be taken to fill the remaining vacancies in the Interpretation section at UNON. Regrettably, some vacant posts remained, particularly in the Arabic and English booths. He asked why it had proven so difficult to fill those vacancies and whether every effort had been made to do so.

4. **Mr. Kramer** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, endorsed the recommendations contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/57/32). He shared the concern about the decline in the utilization rate for conference resources, which had fallen to 74 per cent largely as a result of a significant drop in New York. He was pleased to note that the Committee on Conferences was prepared to supplement dialogue with additional measures to address the recurrent wastage. The General Assembly should consider aligning the allocation of conference resources with the history of actual utilization.

5. Late issuance of documentation remained a critical problem and he asked what author departments were doing to address it, who was held accountable, and whether information about the overall pattern of non-compliance could be gleaned from the new data-management systems. The larger issue of reducing the number of documents that Member States requested and received was perhaps more urgent than ever.

6. Regarding the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289), he said that the Department appeared to be heading in the right direction. He welcomed the commitment to pursue full-system benefits, integrate global management, optimize the use of technology and enhance document planning, production and distribution. He trusted that, in seeking to identify best practices, the Department would look not only within the Organization, but also outside it. The impact of technology on efficiency and productivity would be far-reaching, particularly if the plans to move to a system of complete electronic processing of documents and expand distance work, including remote interpretation, were implemented. Given the Under-Secretary-General's responsibility and accountability for conference services at all duty stations, it would be helpful to have more information about how global management was being put into effect. Formal understandings might be required between the Under-Secretary-General and the Directors-General of the various duty stations, as well as practical tools to facilitate enhanced work planning on a global basis.

7. The integration of the technical servicing secretariats of the Fifth and Sixth Committees into the Department could be expected to contribute to the overall efficiency of the Organization. As to summary

records, their utility was limited under the current circumstances, and he therefore supported the Department's proposal for a study of the practical and cost implications of replacing them with digital recordings.

8. While it was understood that the current workload standards for translators, interpreters and text processors did not take into account the quality of the work accomplished or its intellectual dimension, it remained imperative to have good ways of measuring productivity and assessing cost-effectiveness in the delivery of conference services. He therefore welcomed the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences that workload standards should be updated and that standards should be developed for those occupational groups of language services for which they did not currently exist. There was also a need to develop performance measures for the system as a whole, so that the Department's productivity could be compared with the experience of other entities doing similar work.

9. The delegations on whose behalf he was speaking were committed to high-quality services in all the official languages of the United Nations. They had taken careful note of the important statement on that issue made, at the Committee's 1st meeting, by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Spanish-speaking delegations and agreed that the problems he had raised needed to be examined.

10. Lastly, he expressed appreciation to the staff who provided conference services and emphasized that the discussions about productivity and cost-effectiveness should never be misinterpreted as criticism of their work. Rather, the aim was to ensure that the Department's product was ever more worthy of their efforts.

Organization of work

11. **The Chairman** emphasized the importance of punctuality in avoiding the late start of meetings.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.